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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes viewing students as full-fledged organizational members who participate in school planning, problem-solving, and decision-making about school curriculum, grading policies, teacher evaluation procedures, budget, and the like. Three tested strategies are described that help students increase their understanding of how the school organization works and to become skillful as organizational participants. One strategy involves developing a climate in the classroom where students help set their own learning goals, work toward accomplishing them in collaborative ways, and where they are involved in assessing their own progress. Another strategy described for school improvement calls on students to act as organizational participants in planned change of the formal curriculum. The final strategy aims at improving the effectiveness of student governance structures within high schools. The paper concludes that macro-designs for consultation aimed at student participation have to be extremely comprehensive because of the physical movement of students within and out of the school system. (Author/LD)

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Today's Challenge for Cooperation in Education: Considering Students As Organizational Co-Participants*

by

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Before commencing my topic for this morning, that of students as organizational co-participants with educators, I should like to give at least a glimpse of who I am in relation to the important theme of cooperation in education. I am an American through and through, weaned on the democratic optimism and pragmatism of John Dewey, nurtured by the sociological insights of Charles H. Cooley and George H. Mead, and brought into my maturity of action research by Kurt Lewin and one of his first American students, Ron Lippitt formerly of the University of Michigan. But motivationally speaking I am more than an action-oriented social psychologist. I am a child of the civil-rights movement. Born too late to be directly involved in the second world war and born too soon to become directly embroiled in Viet Nam, I am one of the adolescents who brought food and the vote to Blacks in Mississippi. One of the young adults who marched on Washington to stand before the inspiring Martin Luther King.

Hanging in the hall between the bedrooms of my two children is Emmy Lou Packard's print entitled "Let's Pull Together." It presents 28

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black and white children of different ages energetically pushing and pulling a revolving platform above an angry looking, blood-soaked earth, while reaching upward toward blue doves, a bright orange sun, and a calm sky. The children's earnest expressions, their uplifted motions and postures, and the vivid colors trigger in me the same deep feelings I had when fellow civil rights activists and I sang, "We Shall Overcome" and "Black and White Together."

While Packard's print may more accurately depict those hope-filled years prior to the assassinations of Dr. King and the Kennedy brothers than this post-Nixon period, it still captures for me the reservoir of energy that exists throughout the world for cooperation and pulling together. Moreover, the themes inherent in Packard's "Let's Pull Together" are associated with some of my thoughts about accomplishing more cooperation in schools. While the children in the print are working together with substantial force, they are not clearly organized nor will their burst of cooperative effort long be sustained without some attention to formal organization. Their unbounded energy, just like the temporary zeal of the civil rights movement of the early 60s, will <u>not</u> persist unless it can be harnessed, systematically formulated, and institutionalized.

Our modern, industrial cultures will not become humanized by cooperative energy alone, however important the energy is as a motivator. The very institutions of our cultures--the bureaucracies we live in, day in and day out--must be restructured for humanization and good will toward others to persist. And, of course, humanistic change in our schools is the case in point of this convention. Although cooperation and energy are

crucial for humanizing our schools, systematic strategies for organizational improvement which are themselves humanistic are essential.

I trust that it will be sufficient in introducing myself to you and to the topic of this convention to point out that my energy commitment, and optimism for achieving a more cooperative world through changes in education come both from my intellectual development as a Lewinean, social psychologist and my affective development as a civil-rights worker and enthusiast. With the comments about me as a person, I would like now to speak to my topic for today: Students as organizational participants.

Picture the following real life scene in a school:

> The faculty of Bay City Junior High is engaged in an organization development workshop. It is the afternoon of the second day of a five day event. The faculty has been assigned randomly to a number of small teams. Four of the teams have been designated to take the role of "Planners," and the other four teams are to role-play "Operators" in an exercise to simulate decision making in a school. Some have been asked to team up with consultants as observers of the simulation. Each team of Planners has been directed to devise instructions for its respective Operating team in assembling a specially packaged jigsaw puzzle.
>
> Teams of four Planners are meeting at one end of the school's multi-purpose room, and the teams of four Operators are seated at the opposite end of the room. Each Planning team has been paired with an Operating team to simulate the administrators and teachers of the school. The eight faculty members who have been designated as Observers are walking about a room that is buzzing with activity. There is tension in the air.
>
> The Planners know they can begin giving instructions at any time during the next half hour but that they must give the Operators at least five minutes of instruction and must finish giving instructions and maintain silence after the 30 minutes have passed. Both the Planners and Operators know that the exercise will conclude when the Operators have completed whatever tasks the Planners give them. Planners are not allowed to touch the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle to preclude them from doing the task for the Operators. Once Operators have started to put the puzzle together, the Planners may not help them.

This scenario has been played out at OD workshops many times. Indeed the Planners and Operators Exercise has become a standard feature of training designs in organization development that we and others use to facilitate school improvement. With the teachers, administrators, or other adult professionals of the participating schools, invariably the exercise has served as a powerful, efficient, and relatively non-threatening means of teaching at least three important lessons about certain pitfalls that can occur in relation to organizational problem solving and decision making.

First there is the preoccupation of status responsibility. Planning often becomes a very seductive assignment. The responsibilities of designing a way of assembling the puzzle and of training the Operators both raise the Planners' excitement and narrow their awareness. The Planners often become so involved in their planning that they ignore the very presence of Operators until it becomes absolutely necessary to begin giving instructions. Then their instructions are hurried and the Operators feel at loose ends when the Planners are obliged to leave.

Second there is the alienation of low power position. Operators become increasingly restless and frustrated as the minutes pass and they cannot figure out what work the Planners have in mind for them. When the Operators send notes to the Planners (they are not permitted to initiate a face-to-face visit) to ask for information and receive only cryptic answers if any, their frustration and restlessness increase. They begin to perceive the Planners as not intending to be helpful and supportive, and they come to view themselves as helpless, but as opponents nonetheless of their own organizational co-participants, the Planners.

Third, there is the hierarchical decision making. Once the instructions have been given and Planners must be quiet while Operators work on their own to complete the puzzle, the Planners often become extremely upset as they observe deviations from what they believe to have been clear and valid instructions. However, the Planners realize where they made their mistake in communication and begin to feel angry with themselves for having neglected the Operators for so long during the planning period. They come to appreciate the drawbacks of making decisions for, rather than with, others.

The Planners and Operators Exercise simulates status differences and role distinctions that are typical of schools. Indeed the exercise works well (even better) when the people play Planners who in real life actually occupy low status positions (e.g., teachers) and when those who are really high status holders (e.g., the principal and department heads) take the role of Operators. It is, status and role differentiation and not the personalities of the participants that make the game so much like real life in the school district.

Think for a moment about how differences in status and role might get played out to replicate the exercise in the following real life situations!: (1) an administrative team making plans about those students who will be assigned to particular teachers, (2) the counselors planning the procedures that teachers will be expected to use for referring students to them, (3) a team of teachers planning academic assignments or designing field experiences which students will be required to complete, and (4) a faculty committee planning how to report students' progress to parents.

The dysfunctional dynamics of status responsibility, low power position, and hierarchical decision making that emerge in the exercise could arise in any of these situations; indeed the parallels are so familiar to adult professionals in schools that the similarities between Planners and Operators and these day-by-day occurrances are easily drawn during organization development workshops.

Discussions that follow the exercise help the participants to see who participates and who does not participate in planning, problem solving, and decision making in their own school. Examples such as the four given above often are brought up as parallels to the exercise. Also participants may bring up conflicts and misunderstandings that are presently occurring between individuals and groups within their own setting. The exercise can go a long way toward launching a school improvement effort in which the norms and skills of the adult staff are the focus.

Traditional School Improvement

Similar to most consultants who have applied the strategies of organization development to school improvement, I have consulted almost exclusively with groups of adult professionals. I have helped entire faculties, administrative cabinets, teaching teams, departments of central offices, and advisory or policy-making committees to specify more clearly organizational goals, improve meetings, clarify communication, manage conflicts, and develop innovative procedures and structures for solving problems and making decisions. All these OD activities treat the adult

professionals as synonymous with the school organization. In fact, consultation for organization development, as I and others have practiced it during the last decade, has a well-documented capacity to enhance interpersonal skills, group norms, and organizational structures as they pertain to adult professionals in schools.

While it may be the case that some OD consultants have worked with nonprofessional adults such as parents or interested citizens in the school community (e.g., parent advisory groups associated with Title I schools, parent-teacher groups wishing to start alternative schools or programs, or citizens who volunteer to work as tutors or instructional aides), the instances of such interventions are isolated and they typically have not been documented or evaluated. Perhaps the primary reason for the scant number of OD interventions involving parents has been that such collections of adults are usually unstable, having few regular members who can represent organized and permanent constituencies. Nonetheless, there have been a handful of efforts to apply OD to parent groups, and if some common logistical and practical difficulties can be overcome, the instances of successful applications will undoubtedly increase.

It is in relation to students as organizational co-participants, however, where OD consultants have been most myopic. The theory and practice of OD only rarely has given weight to students as clients. OD consultants along with adult clients have typically regarded students as "products" of the educational system to be acted upon and shaped, as juveniles (not yet responsible citizens) who need to be controlled or protected, or as consumers who occasionally want to express their reactions

and preferences. Seldom have consultants, educators, or parents viewed students as full-fledged organizational members who do, can, or should participate in school planning, problem solving, or decision making. I know of no school where students are viewed as having legitimate influence over the school's curriculum, grading policies, teacher evaluation procedures, budget, and the like.

Many adult-focused school improvement efforts have faltered when students intentially or unknowingly have sabotaged attempts by the adults to work in new ways together. For example, I have consulted with elementary staffs that were attempting to move from a self-contained structure to team teaching. In some of these schools the students' expectations to have their own home-room teacher were so strong that they resisted going along with the teachers' efforts at individualizing instruction and platooning the students into various groups. As another example, I have worked in secondary schools in which the staff's best laid plans for student government went awry because of student apathy and non-involvement.

An explanation for the ability of students to sabotage school improvement efforts may be the failure to adhere to a fundamental tenet of organization development, which states that consultation should be provided to important and intact subsystems of the school--to groups of role-takers who perform important tasks or sets of related, interdependent tasks. Since in schools students outnumber adults by a substantial margin, many of the most important subsystems--classrooms, for example--have student members. The lack of living up to the subsystem tenet has often hindered attempts at school improvement and has constrained the progress

of consultations that are aimed at building the school's organizational capacity to solve problems. By virtue of excluding students from the set of organizational participants, consultants and their adult clients sometimes have had difficulties uncovering and managing important and generic problems with the way work gets accomplished in the school. As examples, OD consultants sometimes have been unable to gain access to students' views about how the school functions and affects them, while teachers and administrators have been unable to predict how students will react to their new plans.

The consequences of failing to consider students as organizational participants and to involve them in school improvement efforts can lead to outcomes that are similar to those of the Planners and Operators Exercise. Teachers and administrators, for example, can become so preoccupied with their own "important" work and heavy responsibilities that they begin to exhibit insenitivity to students' preferences and experiences. Consultants, too, can concentrate so much on the adult professionals that they get sidetracked from improving the quality of education for the students. Teachers also can feel powerless to discipline students and burdened by the extent of the responsibilities they have assumed. Students, for their part, can feel "put down" by imposed rules and become alienated when their ideas and energies have not been used.

In many schools, particularly in troubled urban schools in which the organizational problems are severe and myriad, alienation of adults from other adults and from students is often very high and dysfunctional.

Moreover, within and across the different age groups that spend their time in schools, we have observed a strong association between alienation and mediocracy. Teachers, administrators, students, and consultants alike have sought the lowest common denominator to avoid debilitating and unproductive disagreement over different values that are important to each.

I am not suggesting that all problems of schools or the difficulties faced by OD consultants can be solved simply or easily by bringing students in as full-fledged organizational participants. In fact, I readily admit that such a strategy is largely untried and that consultants, teachers, and administrators lack experiences upon which to ground their theories and technology and adult professionals together as co-clients in school improvement efforts has enough merit to warrant exploration, a major goal of our research and development work in the Program on Strategies of Organizational Change at the Center for Educational Policy and Management at the University of Oregon over the next few years will be in this direction.

Now let me turn to a description of three tested strategies, each of which aims to help students increase their understandings of how the school organization works and to become skillful as organizational participants. These strategies do not comprise a complete list of all that have tried in schools, but instead offer a starting point for planning to achieve school improvement. They represent attempts to make changes away from the traditional hierarchical school in which the adults serve as the Planners and the students the Operators toward a more democratic and polyarchic organizational structure.

Changing Classroom Norms

Several school districts now regularly receive consultation in organization development from cadres of organizational specialists. The cadres are composed of specially-trained teachers, administrators, and counselors working part-time as organizational consultants while also carrying out their regular full-time duties. Our R & D program has trained and studied cadres in Eugene, Oregon and Kent, Washington and are familiar with the operation of additional OD cadres in Polk County, Florida; Santa Cruz, California; and Buffalo, New York.

Members of at least the first two cadres have, on occasion, provided consultation to classroom groups of students and their teachers. The most common designs have involved training the teacher and students simultaneously in the cognitive and behavioral aspects of interpersonal communication, steps and procedures for group problem solving, goal-setting methods, and in the methods of process observation and debriefing in relation to the classroom group. Exercises like Planners and Operators have been used to highlight the dysfunctions of classroom hierarchy while other exercises such as the Five Square Puzzle or the NASA Consensus Activity have been used to help class members and the teacher test out new ways of carrying out joint problem solving and collaborative decision making. After several hours of this training, the cadre members then have helped the students and their teacher to explore the most potent norms that govern how work gets accomplished in their classroom, how students and the teacher relate to one another, and how rewards and punishments get distributed. The analysis of existing classroom norms has served as a springboard for

establishing new norms that were desired and for creating new structures and processes to make the classroom a more enjoyable and effective environment for teaching and learning. Such interventions may include activities in relation to the sequential stages of group growth, classroom leadership, interpersonal communication, and group cohesiveness. Some form of a design to refurbish group norms has been tried with a high school band, a high school art class, elementary school classrooms, and junior high home-rooms and guidance groups.

My evaluations of these cadre interventions indicate that many target groups have developed a more open climate both in terms of support for learning and for personal development--a climate where students help set their own learning goals, work toward accomplishing their goals in collaborative rather than competitive ways, and are involved in assessing their own progress. In classroom groups where extended interventions have occurred, new norms have been built in support of promptness and completeness of assignments, helpfulness to younger children, cleaning up materials and equipment, and talking about feelings rather than acting out upon them.

However, in some schools, particularly those where students do not spend the entire day in a self-contained classroom but rather move into different groups and to be with different teachers, some problems have resulted from consultation to change the norms of one or a few classrooms. Students have been quick to recognize inconsistencies among the norms of different classes and have caused or been caused to have problems as they repeatedly had to adapt to widely differing rules and expectations.

Teachers and students alike have found it confusing and upsetting when, in some classes, student participation was expected and rewarded and students were encouraged to evaluate and discuss how the class was going, while in other classes the spirit of collaboration was very low, the teacher directed all activities, and the students were expected to keep their evaluations to themselves.

Amending Curricula

Another strategy for school improvement which calls upon students to act as organizational participants involves planned change of the formal curriculum. As a member of a curriculum development team, I took this approach by developing a short curriculum module for the American Psychological Association's Project on Human Behavior. The fundamental objectives of the module, Understanding School Life Through Organizational Psychology, were to help students understand dynamics of the school as a form of social organization, to delineate their roles as potential organizational participants, and to present the students with the skills required to design and implement a sustained school-improvement program.

Through a series of experiential activities, readings, and group assignments, students who participate in the module learn how the human motives of affiliation, power, and achievement may be satisfied or frustrated through organizational participation. They have an opportunity to practice some communication skills to facilitate their discussions about interpersonal relations in the school and then explore the roles of individuals, groups and the organization-as-a-whole in carrying out the school's

missions and in satisfying the needs of both the students and the adults. In one activity, for example, students prepare "maps" of the informal structure of the school, designating the groups in which students spend their time out of school. They compare the maps with rosters of students in classrooms, and discuss the congruence of friendship groups to work groups. In another activity students collect questionnaires about the climate of the school from other students, teachers, and administrators. They analyze the data and present a summary in a colloquium setting for members of their class and interested others in the school. This activity can provide the school with important data for diagnosing the satisfactions and frustrations of all participants in relation to the way decisions are made, how conflict is managed, and how goals are established.

This strategy of amending the formal curriculum by adding a special course for some students does not necessarily facilitate normative and structural improvement in the school. It does, however, provide at least some students with understandings and skills that can help them participate more effectively as clients of more comprehensive designs for OD interventions. And in a few instances it has encouraged the development of a special task force that continues on after the module to attempt to design and implement some improvements in the school organization. In one school, for example, dissatisfactions of teachers and students with the operation of the Student Council became the springboard for rethinking how students should be elected to that group, which items were appropriate for its agenda, how its meetings would be conducted, and how its decisions could be transmitted to the student body and faculty.

Improving Student Governance

A third example of efforts to treat students as organizational participants aims at improving the effectiveness of student governance structures within high schools. Within our program, we have developed and field tested an instructional system titled Student Leadership Skills. The design trains members of student councils to examine their own group behavior, to develop more effective interpersonal communication skills, to consider new ways of relating to their constituencies, and to learn more effective procedures for conducting meetings in which collaborative problem solving and decision making occur. The design requires taking the entire student council and its faculty advisor out of school for approximately one week. Through a series of activities and discussion periods, council members learn new understandings and consider applications of their skills to their roles as student leaders and to the responsibilities of their council as a leadership group in the school.

Evaluations of initial field tests led us to conclude that at least two important and new learnings accrued to students who participated. First, they came to understand and appreciate leadership as a set of functions performed by a group instead of as the attributes of particular people. They came to realize that their student council's effectiveness rested on the skills that each of them could and did exhibit. Second, they learned how to observe human behavior, to draw and check inferences from that behavior, and to use their observations to assess the effectiveness and appropriateness of their group's dynamics. Students were surprised

and delighted to learn how to check one another's skills in paraphrasing, for example, and to watch for behaviors that would signal a problem with making decisions in their meetings.

In some schools, students changed the nature of their council meetings after training. Followup investigation of trained students councils, however, showed little transfer and carry over to other groups in the school and some fade-out of effects over time within the council. As council members were confronted with existing norms and structures of their school, and as there was some turnover in council membership, the new norms within the council were eroded. This led us to conclude that a macrodesign of some extended duration with an intensive start up workshop and a series of followup events would be necessary to build a sustained capacity for problem solving into the councils.

The time is right--at least in the U.S.A.--to test out applications of the theories and technology of organization development to students as organizational participants. There are, as I have described, both concepts and ideas for consultation that already have been tested against the reality of bringing students into school improvement efforts.

But there is a lot that is not known by schools and their consultants. We might identify at least two important gaps in available knowledge that ought to be filled before and as future applications with students are tried. The first concerns the lack of current knowledge about how students are related to their schools as organizations and effects that the structures and norms of schools have upon students. The

second concerns the lack of comprehensive designs for promoting student participation in problem solving and decision making in schools.

Students in School Organizations

OD consultants work in schools not only to help clients acquire new interpersonal skills, but also to promote effective organizational norms and structures. Few consultants are satisfied if undersired hierarchical norms persist or if new, more collaborative structures fail to take hold. In relation to efforts to make students more integral organizational participants, however, consultants and their adult clients lack knowledge about those dynamics of schools' norms and structures that relate to the interface between adults and students. They need this knowledge to develop their consultative strategies and to monitor their effects.

There has been very little documented experience and virtually no systematic research on the relationship of students to their school organizations. We don't know, for example, if or how students are affected by student councils, faculty-student senates, or other structures that aim to enhance their participation in problem solving and decision making in their school. As another example, we do not know much about the dynamics through which informal cliques and scheduled groupings of students facilitate or constrain their participation in the school-as-a-whole. And while we know that it is difficult to extinguish the stereotype that views all students as inferior to all adults, we don't know the kinds of role relationships among adults that make the stereotype more or

less likely to be present. What is required, is some large-scale, longitudinal research to produce information about the relationships of students and schools as organizations.

Such an effort will be part of the work of the Program on Strategies of Organizational Change during the next few years. We shall look for chains of causes and effects among (1) norms and structures that govern interaction among adults in schools, (2) innovative and traditional arrangements for promoting student participation in problem solving and decision making, and (3) effects on students' perceptions, skills, and accomplishments. I hope that the knowledge we will gain will prove to be informative and helpful to consultants and schools that wish to extend applications of organization development to students.

Macro-designs for Consultation

Because of the organizational complexities of the many adult and student subsystems of schools, efforts at planned change that aim to help students become full-fledged organizational participants are much larger in scope than the typical OD consultations that have been carried out in schools. For example, a macro-design involving consultation to change classroom norms has to be repeated many times in a large secondary school where students move from classroom to classroom five or seven times a day. As another example, macro-design involving an amendment to the curriculum, requires simultaneous work with administrators and other teachers so they can play their respective parts appropriately. As a final example, a macro-design including an effort to improve student governance requires extensive followup with the group of student clients to prevent fade-out of effects.

Besides the problems of increasing the sheer number of clients and subsystems that need to participate in the school improvement effort, there are further complications that arise in working with students because of their regular flow in and out of the school through matriculation and graduation. A three-year middle school, for example, expects a 33 percent turnover rate each year. Three years, as most consultants know already, represents a very short period of time to build and stabilize new norms and structures in any but the simplist and smallest of organizations.

Macro-designs for consultation aimed at student participation therefore have to be extremely complex and comprehensive. They require more days of consultation by more consultants than is typical of most OD in schools. Consultants who wish to extend applications of OD to students will, I think, find it useful to share ideas about such things as: (1) finding the time to work with students, particularly finding chunks of time that last longer than the class period or school day, (2) supporting adults in the school who act as consultants to student groups, (3) teaching student consultants to help incoming students develop their capacities as participants, and (4) timing and sequencing the various parts of comprehensive designs for training, consultation, feedback, and confrontation.

OD consultants and other change agents in education who aspire to extend applications of their craft to work with students have a major task before them if they are to produce the knowledge needed for school improvement through student involvement. I end, therefore, by noting that the prospects seem exciting, that the problems appear to be many but

not insurmountable, and that the opportunity awaits those who will join in finding ways to understand and help students as organizational members who can and should contribute to improving their schools. I hope someday to begin a speech of this type like this:

> It is the first week of school in 1980 at Bay City Junior High. The entire faculty and student body are involved in a week-long OD workshop to establish a sense of community cohesiveness in the school. During the latter half of the second day some of the students are put into planning teams and teachers along with the school's administrators become Operators. The Planners have the serious responsibility of training the Operators in how to put a complex jigsaw puzzle together. The Operators are waiting restlessly for their instructions . . . .